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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 29 June 2009 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, in which the Assembly established the Advisory Group to advise me on the use and impact of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of the resolution, I have the honour to transmit herewith a note addressed to me on the outcome of the meeting of the CERF Advisory Group, which took place in New York on 28 and 29 April 2009 (see annex).

The note summarizes key points raised during the discussions on both the management of the Fund and its effect on humanitarian operations. The Advisory Group recognized the solid performance of the Fund and noted that CERF had allocated an unprecedented $428 million for use in various crises around the world in 2008, most noteworthy the innovative $100 million reserve that helped nearly 18 million people globally to cope with the humanitarian effects of soaring food prices. The Advisory Group also commended the work of the CERF secretariat towards implementing the recommendations of the independent two-year evaluation of the Fund through continued and systematic dialogue with humanitarian agencies, Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators and non-governmental organizations.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the Member States, of whom more than 107 have contributed to the Fund.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon
Secretary-General

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Annex

Meeting of the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund held on 28 and 29 April 2009, in New York

Note to the Secretary-General

Recommendations and conclusions

The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on the use and impact of the Fund. Their first meeting for 2009 took place in New York on 28 and 29 April. Ms. Yoka Brandt (Netherlands) was elected as Chair and Mr. Moazzam Malik (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as its Vice-Chair.

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefed the Advisory Group regarding the use and management of the Fund in 2008 and the first four months of 2009, and discussed the ongoing management response to the two-year evaluation of the Fund.

The following observations and recommendations are based on updates from the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Controller, consultations with United Nations agencies, the International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a discussion of the management response to the independent two-year evaluation:

1. The Advisory Group commended the 2008 fund-raising efforts, which had exceeded the $450 million target set by the General Assembly by some $3 million and took note that the donor base of the Fund grew to 107 contributing Member States, more than six private organizations, as well as individual contributions through the United Nations Foundation. The Advisory Group notes with appreciation the Secretary-General's personal efforts to broaden political and financial support for the Fund with Member States. However, the Advisory Group noted that, because of the global economic crisis, 2009 would pose its own challenges and recommended that the Secretary-General call upon Member States to make every effort to increase their political and financial support of the Fund.

2. As in previous meetings, the CERF Advisory Group once again recognized the solid performance of the CERF secretariat. Since its establishment in March 2006, more than $1.2 billion had been allocated from the Fund to emergency operations in some 70 countries. Further, the Fund allocated an unprecedented $428 million for use in various crises around the world in 2008. Most noteworthy was the innovative $100 million reserve that helped nearly 18 million people around the world to cope with the humanitarian side effects of soaring food prices in 2008.

3. The Advisory Group attaches great importance to the independent two-year evaluation of the CERF that was carried out in 2008. The Advisory Group commended the work of the CERF secretariat to manage the Management Response Matrix that was derived from it. The Advisory Group is therefore pleased that three fourths of the recommendations have been accepted or at least partially accepted through continued and systematic dialogue with humanitarian agencies, Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators and NGOs. The Advisory Group will continue to

monitor the follow-up of the evaluations recommendations and use that to help guide the Advisory Group's future work.

4. The Advisory Group recalled that, in November 2008, it recommended that the Fund's existing life-saving criteria should be refined so that targeting CERF funds for humanitarian emergencies would be more precise, and the prioritization of needs more clear. The Advisory Group is satisfied that the CERF secretariat will consult humanitarian agencies and NGOs on a revised draft and that the revised Life-Saving Criteria will be finalized before the end of 2009. The Advisory Group noted that devising the revised criteria will require the CERF secretariat to balance the need for them to be flexible enough to be useful in unforeseen circumstances, yet specific enough to remain true to the mandate of CERF.

5. The Advisory Group attaches great importance to steps taken by the CERF secretariat to develop the Performance and Accountability Framework for CERF to ensure accountability and demonstrate the value added of the Fund. The Advisory Group has encouraged the Emergency Relief Coordinator to measure outputs, i.e., the amount of money disbursed, along with outcomes, such as the results of life-saving programmes that would not have been possible without CERF funding. The Advisory Group asked the Under-Secretary-General to devise and implement a complete Performance and Accountability Framework before the end of 2009. The Advisory Group looked forward to discussing this further at their next meeting.

6. The Advisory Group noted that the CERF governing document, the Secretary-General's bulletin (ST/SGB/2006/10 of 10 October 2006) needs to be revised in consultation with the Office of the Controller, the Office of Legal Affairs and participating agencies in order to implement some of the recommendations of the independent two-year evaluation. The Advisory Group hopes to be briefed on a revised Secretary-General's bulletin at its next meeting in November.

7. The Advisory Group observed that NGOs continued to have concerns related to the slow disbursement of sub-grants from agencies receiving CERF funds. In this regard, they took note of a position paper developed by a number of NGOs (for a recent Good Humanitarian Donorship meeting), which recommended steps to be taken to enhance United Nations-NGO partnership for humanitarian funds, including but not limited to the CERF. The Advisory Group stressed that an essential element for an effective humanitarian response is ensuring predictable, timely and cost-efficient funding arrangements between the United Nations and NGO implementing partners. They noted that it is incumbent upon agencies and NGO partners to devise an arrangement that would facilitate the flow of CERF funds from the former to the latter. The Advisory Group asked to see an inventory of agency pass-through arrangements. The Group also asked the Under-Secretary-General to consider adopting a CERF policy on the NGO access issue and to work with the principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to agree to strategic-level improvements to United Nations-NGO partnership in accordance with the principles of partnership. This should also be discussed at the next meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) in September. The Advisory Group hoped that this long-running issue could be resolved as a matter of priority through the IASC and the GHP.

8. The seventh meeting of the CERF Advisory Group marked its first opportunity to discuss directly with the Controller issues related to the

administration of the Fund. The Advisory Group noted the spirit of cooperation that characterized its discussions with the Controller, Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, Jun Yamazaki. The Advisory Group received the assurances of the Controller's imminent approval of the draft interim umbrella letter of understanding, which is important for the performance of the Fund. It would constitute a standard agreement between the Emergency Relief Coordinator and each humanitarian agency, shortening the CERF administrative process and speeding its disbursals by eliminating hundreds of project-specific letters of understanding that are now regularly signed.

9. The Advisory Group was encouraged by the Controller's willingness to discuss possible ways to use the 3 per cent programme support cost towards direct administration of the Fund, as is already being done in the case of the costs of the CERF secretariat. In addition, the Controller noted the suggestion of the Advisory Group that the current Financial Rules and Regulations should be changed in order to fully support CERF as a new, flexible and innovative fund. He mentioned, however, that the legislative authority to amend the Financial Rules and Regulations would rest with the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. The Controller agreed to meet with the Advisory Group whenever it convened in New York. The Group asked the Emergency Relief Coordinator to report to the Advisory Group at its next meeting, in November, on progress made in working together with the Controller to identify operational changes consistent with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations that would lead to the increased efficiency and effectiveness of the Fund.

10. The Group noted with appreciation that the financial and narrative reporting regarding the use of CERF funds has improved. Annual narrative and financial reports are being received in a more timely manner and are of improved quality. Further, the Advisory Group recommended that efforts towards further improvements be taken into account in the drafting of the Performance and Accountability Framework.

11. The Advisory Group remains concerned that the global financial crisis will make it difficult for the Fund to reach the $450 million funding target set for it by the General Assembly in 2009 and 2010. In that light, the Advisory Group endorsed the Communications and Resource Mobilization Strategies and members reiterated their willingness to take steps to raise the Fund's profile and seek additional resources for it.